VOLUME 31 / NO 2 APRIL 1980

# FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

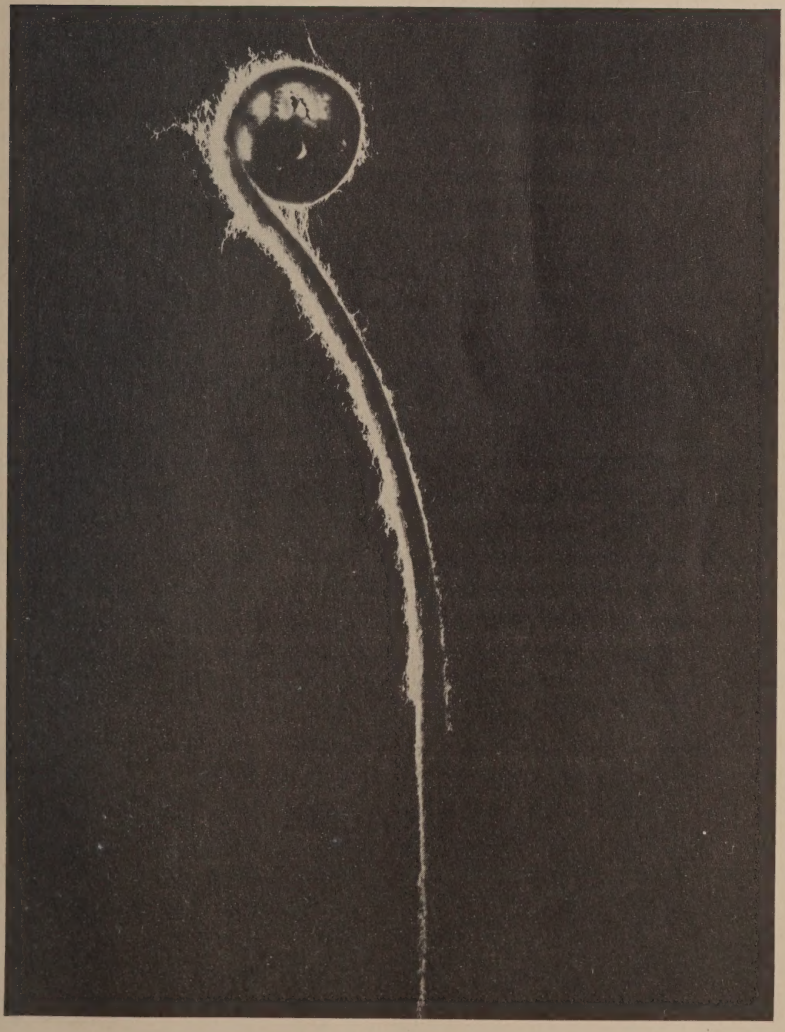

Photo by Carl G. Karsch

FERN FROND UNFOLDING

Since 1949 the purpose of Fellowship in Prayer is to promote the practice of prayer among all religious faiths whose fundamental belief is in God regardless of race, creed, and color, and whose tenets include the universal attributes, honesty, justice, and mercy, that thereby there may arise a closer relation to Almighty God and a deeper spirit of fellowship among mankind.

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EDITORIAL

# New-Age Routes to Prayer

WHEN it comes right down to it, we pray because we have to. No matter how our minds are buttressed by the faith to which we subscribe, the impulse is the same in all – deeper than consciousness, subtler than the emotions. Many of us arrive at it only after we have tested the alternatives – by enduring the resultant suffering and by reaching out in prayer as blindly as the person who steps out of the window of a burning building. We step out of the window, or so my own experience has been, without any certainty of there being anything out there to save us. That there is something out there that does save us is our miraculous discovery, after which we begin in awkwardness and confusion to find out what that something might be and how we can keep in touch with it forever. This seems to be the classic route to prayer (the sinner finally brought to his knees by his sins). It is risky, hard to maintain, and nowadays, to some among us, old-fashioned and unnecessary.

Having belatedly remembered that human beings are herd-animals, we have created a great many groups to support those who have jumped out of this or that burning building: the drinkers in Alcoholics Anonymous, the addicts in Narcotics Anonymous, the mental patients of Recovery, Inc., the neurotics of Emotions Anonymous, the obese of Overeaters Anonymous, and hundreds of other like organizations that help people deal with a problem by using the same program of defeat, surrender, and spiritual growth. In the first and (unfortunately) sole issue of a recent magazine called *24,* an excellent article titled "The Lifesavers" enumerates the variety of such helping groups currently in operation and the spiritual principles and goals that underlie them all. The holistic health movement by embracing all approaches to healing has been making obvious their value and usefulness.

The majority of these new ideas were dismissed at first as foolish fads, but the practice of them by a desperate few has revealed their relevance and importance. And the failure of established institutions to supply practices that offer comparable relief is increasingly persuading us to go in search of something more than the traditional routine. Thus acupuncture, at first a highly publicized novelty, has come into all but standard use, while

megavitamin therapy brings relief to schizophrenics and other sufferers formerly deemed ill and useless.

Because these techniques are new and different from the old, and many of them not yet approved by some well-entrenched physicians who look after us, some of them are popularly looked at askance: the ideas of Ida Rolfe about the connectedness of the body's muscles and the mind's thoughts, the even more controversial ideas of Wilhelm Reich about the powerful influence of sexuality upon every aspect of human existence. Others, like yoga, like Zen, like T'ai Chi, are dismissed by some as exotic imports only momentarily being taken up by the intellectually far-out and fashionable. They should not be dismissed lightly, however, if only because if you will look you will see that it is the intelligent, the educated, and the not-hidebound who are going out to investigate these novelties and coming back with belief in their usefulness not simply to physical but to spiritual health, often experiencing a deepening of their religious faith.

To be freed from affliction and discomfort is, after all, to be freed for the important matters of existence: for understanding and appreciation, for meditation and prayer, for the most constant and most conscious contact with a higher power. People who have freed themselves in one of these novel ways have a characteristic in common, a joy I do not observe in any other part of the world. This joy is wonderful to see, wonderful to recognize as a possibility for everyone. It is a new ideal for our society which, without it, might often seem sorrowfully if not intolerably grim and tragic.

The ideas of an influential book called *Comic Consciousness* by Richard Bucke predicted what appears to be happening today. I quote from Ken Dychtwald's *Bodymind:* "Bucke felt that at some time in the twentieth century a point would come when the human race would make some sort of quantum leap in its own evolution to a condition of more expansive self-awareness, greater intellectual clarity, improved moral harmony, higher consciousness, and loving unity among all beings of this earth. He felt this change would come about when sufficient information and experience had been generated to enable mankind to emerge from the conflicts, confusions, ignorances, and psychoemotional poverties within which it had become trapped by its own weaknesses and stressful developments.

"Bucke suggested that this transformation would be focused upon explorations of the untapped domains of the body and mind, and that these developments would allow for the birth of a new and higher perspective, an elevated way of being, feeling, seeing, knowing, and relating."

In my opinion we ought to open ourselves to these new routes because they clear the way within us to a practice of prayer which may not be easier than the old but could be fuller and richer.

——P.G.

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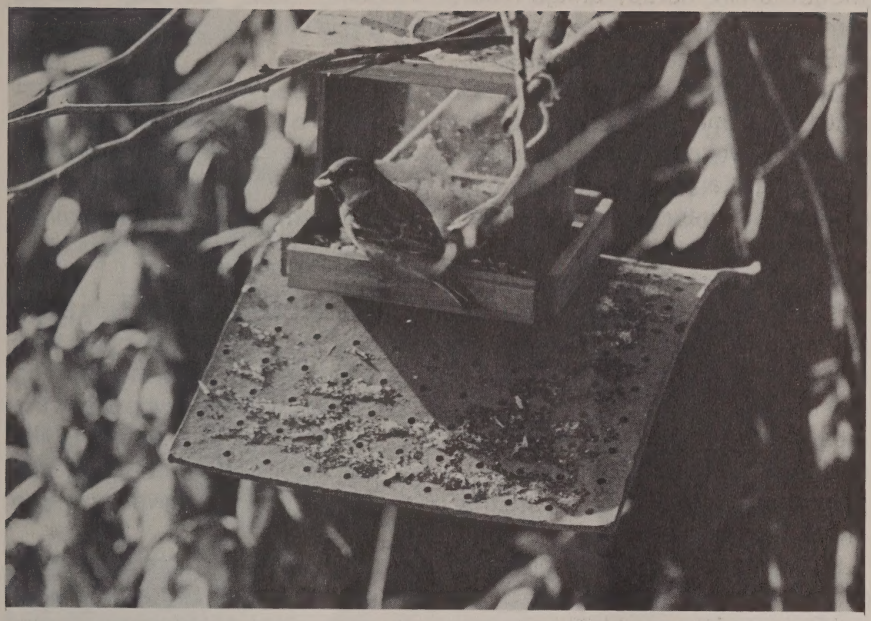
Prayer is a ladder by which everyone may ascend to Heaven.

— Muhammed



# Heavenly Birds

*by Leon Gersten*

Since my sun-deck was built, I have become a bird-watcher. Actually, I don't know the difference between a wren and a blue jay, or an oriole and a woodpecker, yet I have come to love them all. There's something about a bird that makes me feel my own divinity.

My greatest pleasure is in feeding them. Each day I follow the same ritual. Early morning, before I drum up my own breakfast, I wedge a slice of bread into a makeshift birdhouse hanging from a branch. I always make sure the bread is squeezed in tightly so no pieces fall to the ground. Like a parent, I

am concerned about my wild children's feeding habits. "Eat, eat!" I call to the morning sky as I withdraw inside. To help in this way provides me with connection to other living things.

Once, I watched quietly from behind the door to see who would be the first nibbler. To my surprise, a fat squirrel sprang up on the branch and began devouring the crusts. How annoyed I was with this interloper for upsetting my design. "Not for you!" I shouted. My voice must have chased it away. Carefully, I replaced the stolen bits with more. I smiled when I saw wings beating upon the branch. Fluttering wings, quivering branches, and early morning light are a combination hard to beat.

There is something very special about a bird that reminds me of my place in nature. This spiritual awakening comes over me when I gaze on the total scene: my laurel tree whose gnarled limbs embrace the house, the dawning sky, a chilly breeze that chases leaves, and my early visitors who break the misty silence. Such awareness leads to inner peace. In a way, it is like bartering – my giving something to a bird and receiving, in return, its joyful presence. The colorful creature that now pecks at the bread gives me more than I bargained for.

Sometimes there is an element of drama. One cold morning when I looked out, I spied a baby bird on the ground, squirming to be back above. I knelt to watch its movements and took pity on its plight. My hand must have been heavy, for it panicked. How could I make it know I was its friend? What, I thought, does one do with an injured bird? Instinctively I placed it back on the branch where I had seen a nest, tucked it inside, and prayed God would intervene. I have no way of knowing its fate, but I felt good at restoring it to its natural place. Always I have faith that God, no less than man, loves birds, too.

For me, loving birds is loving my fellow beings, since the tenderness I feel for them carries over to my human relationships. The carry-over is more sympathy for and understanding of and greater affinity with the struggles of all. The analogy is obvious: just as a bird is often tiny and defenseless, so a person can be vulnerable, too. Essentially we are all naked in God's eyes. At times, I yearn to hold others in the same way I held that downed bird, and lift them back to strength and confidence.

I love to take pictures of birds and place them in albums. With a telescopic lens, I englarge their dimensions and make them bigger than life. A bird, on the scale of beauty, has intricate appeal. Maybe, I think, if I know what makes a bird a bird, I will know what makes me me. We are not so far apart.

There are those who smile at my ritual each morning and think me odd. To them, what I do is curious. But to me, gathering bread, stepping out into the cold, and snuggling it into the birdhouse is one devotion I refuse to give up. My contact with heavenly birds is one of my connections with a larger arrangement that I know exists.

# IN A BORROWED WOOD

*by Mary Gilbert*

I do not ask, but am given
permission to be here.
In a borrowed wood, I walk
at sunrise.
Beads of mist drip softly,
forcing the earth awake.

Pine scent wafts from my cabin chimney;
yesterday's wood burning, white and dead.
A quail flies out of the still brush.
My footsteps echo,
as I walk in a borrowed wood.
I'm here but a moment in time,
with God's breath of eternity on me.

***by Paul A. Lacey***

*The man of prayer*
*who loves with his whole heart –*
*it is not without anxiety that*
*he ventures into the conflict*
*of prayer with his God.*

*–Soren Kierkegaard*

# PRAYER IS CONFLICT

PERHAPS no word in religious language is more loaded with emotional connotations than "prayer." We all know those who make it a shibboleth for judging others, who insist on the most rigid formulaic pieties, and whose attitudes betray the most smug self-assurance. The Pharisee thanking God he is not like this publican has driven many seekers away from the communion with God they seek. Then there is the person who makes prayer a kind of magic and guarantees that, if you know how to do it, the results you want are sure to come. He talks about the *power* of prayer, and power there is, but it is often the power of an aggressive ego shaping a situation to its own ends. God becomes something like a good-luck charm. One who has argued with such a person, and been dismissed with a pitying promise that he will pray for you, may leave determined never to pray again.

There are those for whom prayer is so associated with mendacity and smug piety that they reject both form and content and say, in effect, thank God I am not like that Pharisee. The practice of prayer engages none of the major figures in the "death of God" theology, and Bishop Robinson in *Honest to God* speaks with genuine relief of his discovery that he need no longer feel guilty at being unable to practice prayer. What they have been told about its virtues has so worked on many people that, out of integrity, they turn away from all prayer.

The claims I make for prayer are extremely modest. I do not recommend it

*ABRAHAM'S SACRIFICE, etching by Rembrandt, 1655.*

as a source of power, though I believe it has power and that I have known something of that power. I do not urge it as the highest form of worship, lest we be betrayed into spiritual pride. Nor do I recommend it as another kind of self-centered introspection in which one gloats over all one's wonderful insights. I only say that, when worship has been most refreshing and genuine for me, it has been when I was praying; and that though I know there are countless people in the world who live full, precious lives, whose works are greater, whose love is more outgoing, whose witness is in every way more persuasive than mine, and who never feel the need to pray, I also know that without prayer my own life falls apart, my work is shallow, my love selfish, my witness pitiful.

Prayer, says Simone Weil, consists of attention. It is being truly *present* in this moment and this place, bringing to bear all one is and has been to the

call of this occasion. Prayer is *attending,* listening, seeing, asking, answering – all of these actions, performed in an attitude of reverence.

Someone may object that, if this is all prayer means, we do not need the special word, since many non-religious people practice such reverent attention in their lives. This objection helps to make my point, that the first stages of prayer, divorced from formula and sanctimony, are practiced all around us and by us much of the time. The name may not be acceptable, but the practice of attention is. We begin in affirmation of what is, and we make our affirmation in gratitude and celebration. How often have you wanted to say, "Glory be for this day," or "Thanks be" that things have gone so well? Gerard Manley Hopkins' lovely poem, 'Pied Beauty,' is really a prayer. That prayer will not satisfy everyone, for it so delights in the creation that it turns to the Creator almost as an afterthought. But Hopkins' tact is just right. The prayer of gratitude lingers over and celebrates what *is.* If we are led beyond phenomena to a perception of something or someone behind them, we follow; if not, we rest with regarding reverently what we know. Celebrating what *is* means enjoying it part by part, searching for the right names for it, letting its nature make itself known. And that attitude has a way of irradiating the rest of our life, linking what else is real with our reality, substantiating and confirming what is true in us.

The simplest of all prayers is the prayer of thanks. It is also the bedrock of all prayer, for me. Without it, I could trust no other kind. For the prayer of gratitude acknowledges not only the richness of what confronts us, but also that it is somehow there on our behalf. The affirmation reaches outside us, but also deep into our nature. And this prepares the way for the next stage of prayer, the prayer of self-examination and confession.

Self-examination and confession are no more the special preserve of those who pray than gratitude is, but they too rest on what characterizes prayer – reverent attention.

Confession of weakness can be the most delightful of pastimes. The line between bragging and confessing, in fact, is extremely hard to draw. We have all been beset by a friend who wanted to tell us in the most torturous detail how false or weak he was. Probably we have also been in his situation and found that no comfort given was as much satisfaction to us as the wallowing in recrimination and self-pity which we called confession. How often we discover that the person who poured his whole soul out to us last week, and went away with our acceptance and understanding, not only did not go away ready to start anew but actually enjoyed the whole melodramatic business so much that he has been peddling this particular confession to all his other friends and intends to make it part of his permanent repertoire.

Self-examination in prayer, if one persists in it, is quite different. Graham Greene gives us a powerful example in *The Heart of the Matter,* when

Scobie decides he must put himself beyond God's love by taking his life. His confession is full and terrible and carries us right to the bottom of Scobie's despair. But any monologue persisted in long enough turns into a dialogue, and Christ begins to answer Scobie, to probe his doubts and motives, and to offer him not acceptance alone but the foolish extravagance of forgiveness:

> So now he couldn't keep the other voice silent: It spoke from the cave of his body: it was as if the sacrament which had lodged there for his damnation gave tongue: You say you love me, and yet you'll do this to me – rob me of you forever. I made you with love, I've wept your tears. I've saved you from more than you will ever know; I planted in you this longing for peace only so that one day I could satisfy your longing and watch your happiness. . . . There are no capital letters to separate us when we talk together. I am not Thou but simply you, when you speak to me; I am humble as any other beggar. Can't you trust me as you'd trust a faithful dog? I have been faithful to you for two thousand years.

Scobie no longer stands in an echo chamber of his own making, he confronts the Presence he has sought and finds that it will not let him go without a struggle.

Similarly, in *The Brothers Karamazov,* the silent Christ confronting the Grand Inquisitor reduces him to such self-awareness that he too becomes silent. The Inquisitor does not repent, for we are always free to back away from our prayers, but he knows himself and what he is doing.

The monologue which becomes dialogue underlies the rhythm of worship in *The Book of Common Prayer.* The Order of Prayer begins with the call to confession, to which the congregation responds with as searching and complete an acknowledgement of pride and sinfulness as we are likely ever to make:

> Almighty and most merciful Father: We have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against thy holy laws. We have left undone those things we ought to have done; and we have done those things we ought not to have done; and there is not health in us.

What a luxury of self-pity. If we stop there, with the diagnosis and the self-reproach, there is indeed no health in us. We want to make an idol of our own authenticity and integrity, to persuade ourselves that we will do nothing which is not confirmed by some feeling of ours, to obey nothing but some inner sense. But the prayer goes on to speak of promise, mercy, and restoring the penitent, and it is followed by the Absolution. Like the Grand Inquisitor, we can hold back from the cost of accepting forgiveness and

absolution, but we must do it knowingly. We are caught in the dialogue, and the other voice speaks tenderly, but briskly, with understanding but no nonsense.

Here Kiekegaard's words speak to us. The "conflict of prayer" is the real test of its validity. There we know the Divine Other as confronting us, probing, testing, loving and correcting. We say we want to give up everything to this encounter, but there is always some corner of self not included in the inventory, some pet hope or notion which we decided to take for granted. And suddenly, the jolly little love-feast we were having, or the significant therapy session, turns into a conflict. After we have catalogued all our garish and spectacular vices and are congratulating ourselves on being quite diabolical sinners, we may realize that the critical intelligence we stand before has shifted away from all this camouflage and is leading us to examine some failing which is so petty, so lacking in the dignity of damnation that we would blush to admit it as our nature — but there is that voice saying, "Yes, all those other things are dreadful, but why don't you stop telling lies, why don't you stop getting angry over trivial slights, why, in short, don't you change all those things which make you not only a sinner but an unpleasant person?"

I have avoided as long as possible speaking anthropomorphically, but it is obvious that everything we can say about prayer finally rests on an understanding of God which is most frequently put in those terms. In prayer we recognize an existence which is present *over against us,* as the theologians put it. All life is meeting, says Martin Buber, and when we meet reality we find our language can only hint at the experience by imagining it as like the encounter between personalities. That is why I speak of dialogue or of being searched by a critical intelligence. The language acknowledges its own inadequacy, however. We speak of dialogue, and words are given to us, but we do not mean there is a voice. We say we are led, but it is not the leading of the reason alone – since often we are led in a way which the reason would not arrive at. Nor is it merely our own inclination – for sometimes the leading we feel puts down our will as interference and takes us where we do not want to go. Despite all the limitations of language, we can say of prayer that it rests on our persuasion that we have been known, cared for, and guided by whatever is at the center of all being.

This experience is the only basis for the third stage of prayer, intercession for others. To pray for another makes sense only if we agree with Simone Weil that "the best support for faith is the guarantee that if we ask our Father for bread, he does not give a stone." To pray for another is to bring him into that Presence in which correction occurs, insight comes, healing begins. It is, put very simply, to bring one home into the light.

A friend told of weeping over her sorrows and suddenly realizing that God was not getting out of this scot-free either. Her sorrows were still real, but

they were now being shared. To bring someone into the light, we must accompany him and see both our own darkened soul and the darkened soul of our brother. In prayer we assume another's burden as a preliminary to recommending it to God. Somehow we must direct our full attention toward our brother, but it must be in the context of the already committed attention of God. Dietrich Bonhoeffer puts the point in a shocking way when he says that the Christian comes to others only through Jesus Christ. We see another person in his fullest nature only when we see him as God's child. Seeing him surrounded by the love of God, the inheritor of all the promise of life, we are not tempted either to sentimentalize his failings or to despise them. We sympathize with the frailty, for we know it in ourselves, but we do not underestimate his power to grow. And we learn what *we* are required to do, for prayer is action.

Prayer is action. It is attention, gratitude, confession, intercession. It is fellowship, for we know ourselves to be bound with all those seeking to orient their own lives toward God and we are sustained by their fidelity, their love, and their prayers. But most of all, prayer is conflict. Jacob wrestles the angel all night in a waste and desolate place, and he wins, but the angel by a trick throws Jacob's hip out of joint and escapes. At the end of the story, having fought with and justified himself before God, Jacob is alone and in pain. Is the angel's trick an act of cruelty or of mercy? Does the overthrow of man's desires come as malevolence or grace?

How often the humility of prayer masks simply another kind of pride. "I know I have no right to ask this," one says coyly, knowing how hard it then is for the other to refuse, since what would be rejected as a claim on justice must be given to so arrogant a demand for mercy. "I know I do not know," one says smugly, thanking God that he is not like other men. "Give me a sign," says another, meaning, "I know what needs to be done; confirm my decision, or win the others over."

But God is a consummate wrestler. He has a way of tripping us into the most humiliating tumbles just when we have consciously assumed the most prayerful posture. Standing with arms outstretched, eyes piously upturned in rapt meditation, we are suddenly shoved from behind and wind up praying sprawled on our faces. Real prayer persisted in is always conflict, in which God pulls any kind of trick of grace – and not simply to win, but to train us for his service.

*Used by permission of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting.*

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The experience of finding the first friend is none the less a wonder as first love or even greater.

– C.S. Lewis
*(Surprised by Joy)*

# How Mr. Pappas became Fr. Eleftherios

# The Miracle

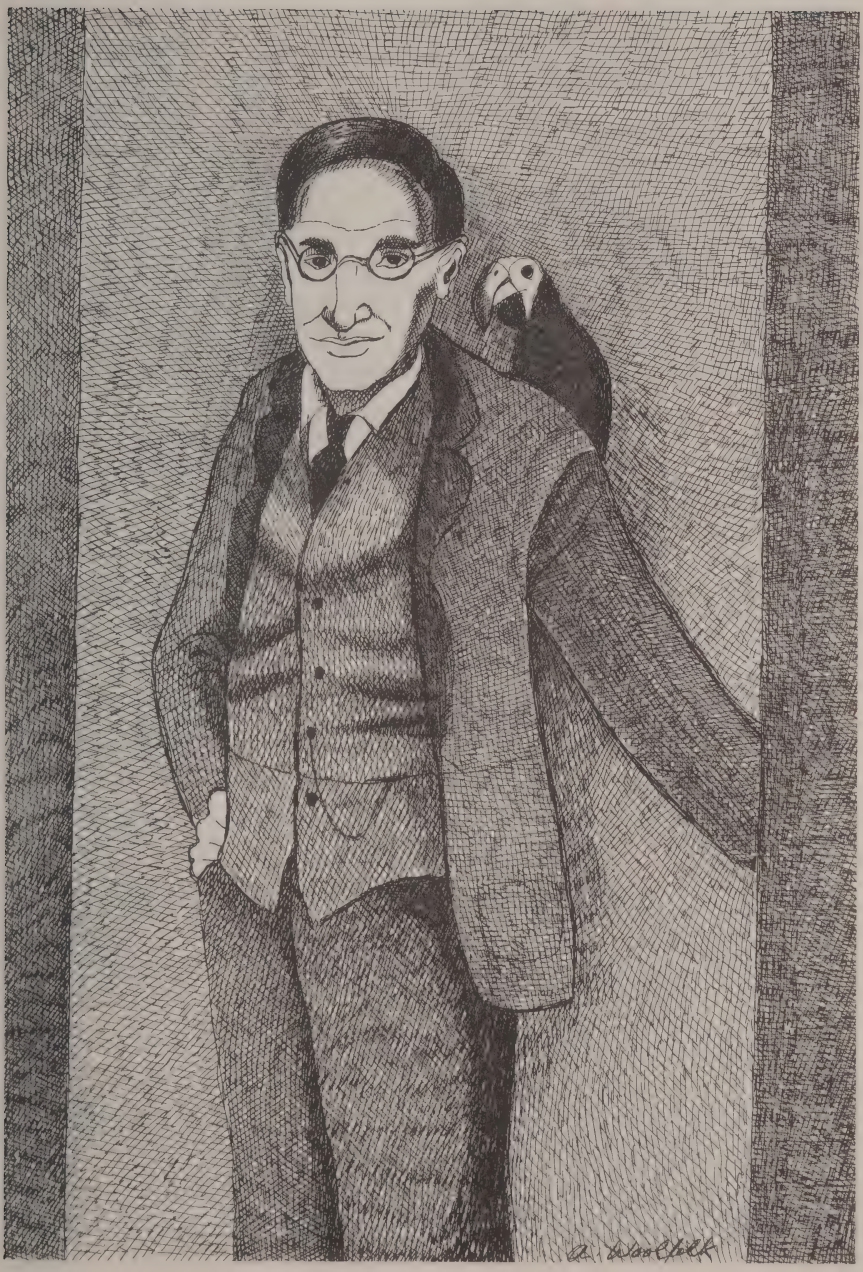
*by Jim Panos*

I knew Father Eleftherios when he was Mr. Eleftherios – Mr. Eleftherios Pappas, the dry cleaner. Even I used to call him Mr. Eleftherios rather than Mr. Pappas, in accordance with the Greek custom of expressing a friendly respect for one's elders. Similarly, I call his wife Mrs. Elenitsa. Their children I called by their given names, since we were friends: Alex, Mike, Mary, Cleo, and Dina. After the miracle, of course, Mr. Eleftherios was Father Elef therios to me as to everyone else.

He was a tall, thin, almost skeletal man with graying hair. In my ten-year-old eyes, he was an old man. Looking back from my present vantage-point, I see he must have been in his middle forties at the time. He had bright brown eyes that sparkled behind a pair of wire-rimmed glasses. He sported a manly mustache and always seemed to need a shave.

We were next-door neighbors on Eighth Avenue in the Astoria, Queens, section of New York. Our particular block was largely populated by Greek immigrants, like our parents, who had come to America after World War I to seek their fortunes in the promised land. Astoria Dry Cleaners, where Mr. Eleftherios toiled long and hard to earn his family's bread in those Depression years of the thirties, was located on Fourth Avenue. For the most part, it was a one-man operation. Mrs. Elenitsa would help her husband after she had taken care of the children. Alex and Mike would do their share at the shop after school. Weekends and holidays, even Mary, Cleo, Dina, and I, who were younger, would report for work too. Our job was to go through the pockets of clothing for valuables and coins – and allowed by Mr. Eleftherios to keep any small change his careless customers may have overlooked.

But, for the most part, it was a one-man operation. So it was that Mr. Eleftherios was alone in his shop when the fire broke out. It seems he had lit a cigaret while cleaning some clothes, and the flame of his match somehow ignited the fumes of the cleaning fluid. The small shop became an instant inferno. Mr. Eleftherios promptly ran out. On the sidewalk, dazed and scared, he watched the flames devour his place of business. Then he remembered he had a considerable amount of money in his register – almost twenty dollars, he recalled later. He rushed back into his burning



shop to retrieve the money, but the blaze was too far gone. He stood, transfixed, just inside the door. There he collapsed, partly inside, partly outside the store.

That was how the police and firemen found him. They pulled him to safety, unscathed by the fire but in a deep state of shock. They rushed him to Astoria General Hospital, but it was too late. Mr. Eleftherios Pappas, the dry cleaner, had suffered a stroke that left him paralyzed on his right side.

After that, Mr. Eleftherios was a broken man. He was, of course, broken in a physical sense. He could not talk clearly – he babbled. He could not feed himself without dribbling food on the table and his person. His shrivelled right leg dangled like a dead limb. He carried it in a harness which he wore like leather suspenders and dragged himself on crutches. His hair and mustache seemed to turn white overnight, and the light went out of his bright eyes. His doctors decreed unequivocally that he would be a cripple for the rest of his life.

Worse, Mr. Eleftherios was a spiritually broken man. He withdrew into himself as into a protective shell. He became morose and ornery. He would sit by a rear window of the living-room, reading Greek newspapers and magazines. Mr. Eleftherios was not an educated man, but he could read haltingly and write in a child's hand and grammar. Even though he had lost his business, he was too proud to go on relief. So Mrs. Elenitsa was reduced to taking in laundry. Alex and Mike quit school and got menial jobs. The girls helped their mother in their spare time. The Pappas family barely managed to hang on.

Much as I used to love to go to their house, I came to loathe it after Mr. Eleftherios came home from the hospital. I could not bear to see him in his lonely corner, constantly reading his Greek newspapers. He had become grotesque. The mere sight of him filled me with disgust. My mother kept reminding me that it was a sin to feel that way, but I couldn't help it, I really couldn't.

The Pappases had a parrot called Papagalos, which flew about the house freely, perching on everyone's shoulders and croaking his greeting to visitors in passable Greek: "Kalimera! Kalimera!" or "Papagalos! Papagalos!" exulting in the sound of his own name. Now Papagalos brooded in his cage, a silent and crippled bird by the side of his silent and crippled master.

Mr. Eleftherios had been crippled for five or six years when, one Saturday night, he had a dream in which a lady in black appeared before him. In her outstretched arms she offered him the robes of a Greek Orthodox priest and urged him to go to church and to follow in the footsteps of his uncle. Mr. Eleftherios awoke and told his wife, haltingly, about his dream. Mrs. Elenitsa

at once recognized the lady in black as the *Panaghia* – the Holy Mother of God, urging him to follow the calling of his late uncle, who had been a priest in Greece.

Now, Mr. Eleftherios had been a religious man all his life. He never missed a Sunday service at St. Stylianos Church, where, in fact, he performed as cantor. He observed all of the Greek Orthodox holidays, even though many of these were not observed in America. He would close shop on Greek Good Friday, whether or not it coincided with the "American" Good Friday and regardless of any inconvenience to his customers. He kept the fast strictly. He abstained from meat on Wednesday and Friday the year round and for forty days before Easter. He imposed the same abstinence on his family. Once, driving to Atlantic City to visit relatives over a long weekend, he stopped the car at a roadside stand for refreshments. The children wanted hot dogs, but it happened to be a Friday, and Mr. Eleftherios would not hear of it. Instead, he bought some frankfurter rolls and some bananas, split the rolls, peeled the bananas, placed the bananas in the rolls, and passed them off to the kids as hot dogs.

Since his accident, however, Mr. Eleftherios had lost faith in God as well as in himself. He never went to church any more. And so he ridiculed his wife's interpretation of his dream. When the same dream occurred to him the Saturday following, he was somewhat more amenable to her entreaties that he go to church. But, knowing he could never be a priest for lack of formal education, let alone his age, he did nothing about it. When the lady in black returned the third Saturday, she was positively furious at him for disobeying her command. Mr. Eleftherios awoke from his dream with a start, trembling and bathed in perspiration. In the dead of night, it was a simple matter for Mrs. Elenitsa to persuade him to go to church the next morning.

Mr. Eleftherios appeared to be in church in body only that Sunday. The Pappas family had occupied an entire bench, with the father a limp, listless figure in their midst. Through it all, through the chanting of the Byzantine hymns he knew so well, the rising, the kneeling, and the prayers of the faithful, Mr. Eleftherios slouched in his seat, clinging to his crutches as if he feared someone might steal them from him. Never once did he cross himself.

Then, at the most sacred moment of the liturgy, when the priest brings forth the chalices that contain the bread and wine to be transformed into the body and blood of Christ, Mr. Eleftherios let out a long, loud wail. It seemed to gush from hell and reach all the way to heaven above. A hush fell over the congregation, as if God had dropped a blanket on it. The priest, holding the chalices aloft, faced the assemblage with surprise. Then, incredibly, still screaming with pain, Mr. Eleftherios knocked over his crutches and sprang

to a standing position on his good leg, holding on to the back of the bench in front of him for support.

"Scissors! Scissors! Bring scissors!" he cried in a clear voice. Somewhere, someone found a pair of scissors and ran to the side of Mr. Eleftherios. "Cut the straps," he cried. "Cut the straps! The pain is killing me!"

The straps that held up Mr. Eleftherios's right leg were cut, the harness released, and Mr. Eleftherios stood on his own two feet for a drawn moment, his arms stretched out in the form of a cross. Then he collapsed, consumed by excruciating pain. As he described it later, it was like a sword of fire that slashed through his body. When he came to, he stood up and made his own halting way to the astonished priest. He knelt and kissed the hem of the holy man's robe. The priest, still holding the chalices aloft, announced to the congregation: "My fellow Christians – we have just witnessed a miracle of God."

Alex and Mike helped their father back to his seat. The priest completed the liturgy and went into a special service to celebrate the miracle that had taken place in his church. There was great jubilation. The faith of everyone present was greatly strengthened.

Our family knew nothing about the miracle. For some reason, we had missed church that Sunday. Mrs. Elenitsa called that afternoon and asked us to go over as soon as possible. There was an urgency in her voice on the phone, so we wasted no time.

My father rang the bell. Presently the door was opened, slowly, deliberately – by Mr. Eleftherios himself. A broad grin lighted his face. His brown eyes sparkled once again behind his wire-rimmed glasses. Tears streamed down his cheeks. He completed the ceremony of opening the door and stood clear of it to welcome us. The parrot, Papagalos, perched on his shoulder, croaked its fool head off: "Kalimera! Kalimera!" As we rushed in, Mr. Eleftherios embraced us, each and everyone of us, beaming with joy.

In a corner of the entry hall, resting idly against the wall, stood his old standbys – the crutches he would never need again.

The spectacular cure of Mr. Eleftherios defied both the science of medicine and the traditions of our church. His doctors offered elaborate and unconvincing explanations for his incredible recovery. The church explained it, quite simply, as a miracle. In spite of his lack of formal education and his advanced age, Mr. Eleftherios was tutored privately as a theological student and eventually, by special dispensation, ordained a priest.

And so it was that Mr. Eleftherios became Father Eleftherios.

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Why should a man certain of immortality think of his life at all?

– Joseph Conrad

# Another of the holidays Jesus observed:

# PURIM

*by Samuel M. Silver*

In addition to Chanukah and Passover, the Hebrew calendar contains another freedom festival called Purim. The name comes from a Persian word meaning "lots." The holiday originated in Persia, as we can see from the Book of Esther, which relates the events giving rise to it.

The Book of Esther tells that a courageous Jew named Mordecai was the only Persian who refused to bow down to Haman, the tyrannical prime minister of the court of King Ahasuerus (probably one of the kings our history books call Xerxes.) Indignant that Mordecai would not make obeisance to him or his image (Mordecai would bend his knee only to God), Haman correctly surmised that there was something in Hebraic ideals which posed a threat to his total control of the country. He determined to eliminate not only Mordecai but his entire people. So he talked to the king, who is depicted as a nincompoop, into believing that the Jews were a dangerous element in the empire who ought to be wiped out and that Mordecai ought to be hanged. The king agreed.

The Book of Esther has a subplot. It concerns a queen, Vashti, who was like Mordecai in her refusal to acquiesce to autocracy. The king wanted her to come before his guests at a saturnalia and display her beauty. She refused and was thereupon liquidated. Following which there comes the strange tale of the king's ordering a beauty-contest to be held so that a successor could be found for Vashti. Who should win the contest but a Jewish girl, Esther, a cousin of Mordecai, who instructed her to conceal her identity lest Haman discover it?

The Book of Esther, a model short-story, includes yet another plot. Mordecai overhears a couple of conspirators plotting the death of the king and, true patriot that he is, reports the plot to the authorities. The king later hears how Mordecai has saved his life. He asks Haman what would be the proper way to reward someone to whom the king would like to honor. Supposing the king is talking about himself, Haman suggests the man should be given royal clothing and be paraded on the royal horse through the capital with loud cries announcing that such is the way the king honors a special person." Excellent," says the king. " Do what you have just proposed for Mordecai." Thus Haman is compelled to bestow honors on the man he despises.

Later, Esther reveals Haman's plot, the king has him sidetracked, and Mordecai is elevated to the post of prime minister. Although the story contains an element of genocide, the spirit of the people of Jesus was such that they stressed not its mournful aspect but the cheerful one. As a result, Purim – a reference to the use of "lots" to determine the date of Mordecai's execution – became one of the happiest days of the calendar. Before the holiday, the people fasted. On Purim proper, they cavorted. The Book of Esther was read aloud in the synagogue. When Haman's name was mentioned, noise-makers and catcalls were permitted to emphasize the odiousness of bigotry. Prayers, songs, and sermons underscored the idea of human liberty, the need to remain firm in loyalty to God and not to give His glory to another. At the feast one of the delicacies was a sweetmeat shaped like Haman's hat.

The holiday could not be celebrated unless it was accompanied by gifts for the poor. This was ordained in the Book of Esther. The idea was that the celebrant must bring uplift and aid to others while rejoicing over the deliverance of his people.

During Purim, young Jesus may have taken part in masquerades and pageants that retold the story of Esther and Mordecai. Ultimately, Purim became the chief gift-giving holiday for the people of Jesus, whose own birthday was to become the gift-giving holiday for myriads.

The holiday which Jesus and his family celebrated most frequently, of course, was the Sabbath. When the Sabbath was originally decreed, it

constituted a radical advance in social betterment, for it declared that men cannot be subjected to toil without respite: the seventh day was given over to rest, to worhship, study, and family togetherness.

The Sabbath is ordained in the Ten Commandments. There are two versions of this in the Bible. One, in Exodus 20, says the Sabbath was proclaimed a day of rest because the Lord Himself rested on that day. The second, in Deuteronomy 5, says that in Egypt the Jews were subjected to unremitting toil and that the Sabbath is thus a way of keeping them from being "Egyptianized" again. Reverence for God and respect for man became the double rationale for the Sabbath.

The worship service Jesus attended would have included prayers extolling the Lord for His goodness. The Torah Scroll, containing the first five books of the Bible, would be taken from the ark, and the Pentateuchal selection of the week would be read, then a later book of the Bible. This last reading would be done by a lad of thirteen, said to be celebrating his Bar Mitzvah (meaning that he was an adherent of the *mitzvah,* the religious rules). The leader would then expound the readings and show how they applied to contemporary issues.

After worship, the family assembled to bless the wine and to study. A nap was often the order of that time of day. When Sabbath ended, at sunset, the wine was blessed and fragrant spices inhaled – a ceremony called the Farewell to the Sabbath, or Havdalah. The word means "separation."

A number of minor holidays occupied Jesus and his contemporaries. One of them was the New Year of the Trees, or Arbor Day, which took place in what we now call January. It was highlighted by the planting of trees, outings, and picnics, all designed to raise the consciousness of the worshipper to the beauties and bounties of nature. The holiday was a marriage of ecology and theology.

Another observance took place in the middle of summer. It was a sad day. It commemorated the destruction of the temple by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. The horrible consequences of this are graphically delineated in the Book of Lamentations, attributed to the prophet Jeremiah, who was said to have witnessed the holocaust. This melancholy occasion, known as the Ninth Day of the Hebrew Month of Ab, involved abstention from food for the larger part of the day and declarations of faith in God despite calamity. The observance greatly fortified the morale of the people of Jesus after the Romans repeated the destructive acts of the Babylonians in the year 70 A.D.

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*(This series by Rabbi Silver will be concluded in the fall with an article about Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.)*

# From the Upanishads

Twelfth Khanda of the Chandogya Upanishad

'Fetch me from thence a fruit of the Nyagrodha tree.'

'Here is one, Sir.'

'Break it.'

'It is broken, Sir.'

'What do you see there?'

'These seeds, almost infinitesimal.'

'Break one of them.'

'It is broken, Sir.'

'What do you see there?'

'Not anything, Sir.'

The father said: 'My son, that subtle essence which you do not perceive there, of that very essence this great Nyagrodha tree exists.

'Believe it, my son. That which is the subtle essence, in all that exists has its self. It is the True. It is the Self, and thou, O Svetaketu, art it.'

'Please, Sir, inform me still more,' said the son.

'Be it so, my child,' the father replied.

*Thirteenth Khanda*

Place this salt in water, and then wait on me in the morning.'

The son did as he was commanded.

The father said to him: 'Bring me the salt, which you placed in the water last night.'

The son having looked for it, found it not, for, of course, it was melted.

The father said: 'Taste it from the surface of the water. How is it?'

The son replied: 'It is salt.'

'Taste it from the middle. How is it?'

The son replied: 'It is salt.'

'Taste it from the bottom. How is it?'

The son replied: 'It is salt.'

The father said: 'Throw it away and then wait on me.'

He did so; but salt exists for ever.

Then the father said: 'Here also, is this body, forsooth, you do not perceive the True, my son; but there indeed it is.

'That which is the subtle essence, in it all that exists has its self. It is the True. It is the Self, and thou, O Svetaketu, art it.'

'Please, Sir, inform me still more,' said the son.

'Be it so, my child,' the father replied.

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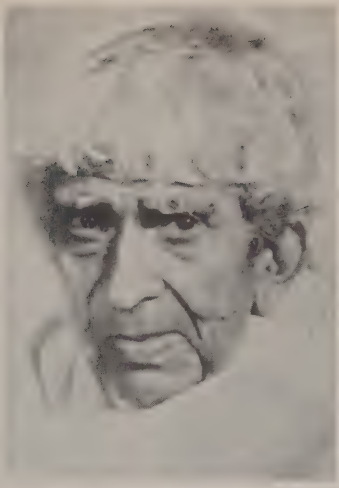

# "Beloved Dada"

## The faith of India's Sadhu Vaswani was to "do good to all"

*by J.P. Vaswani*

WHENEVER I think of him, my thoughts move out to a saint of God who became a servant of suffering humanity. After finishing his work on earth, we read in a story – and the story is a parable – , he goes to the heaven-world. He is about to enter the heaven-world when he hears a voice. It comes from a corner of the earth. The voice says, "In anguish am I. Is there none to help?" The saint says to himself, "Not for me the joys of the heaven-world. Back to earth must I go, for a brother or a sister is in pain."

Such a one was Sadhu Vaswani, who, in love and reverence, is called "Beloved Dada." He never longed for the joys of the heaven-world nor aspired to a life of *mukti,* liberation from the cycle of birth and death. The question was put to him more than once: "Is there anything higher than *mukti?"* He said, "I do not aspire to *mukti.* I would like to be born again and again to help those that suffer and are in pain."

Toward the close of his earth-life, he said, one day, pointing to a street dog, "I would not mind being born a dog, if thereby I could help someone in need." On one occasion, he said, "I would wish to enter hell to give the love of my heart to those that burn there in the fires of selfishness and greed."

Beloved Dada was born on November 25, 1879, in Hyderabad-Sind, a land that has given birth to many saints and servants of God and man.

He was a brilliant student. Soon after passing the M.A. examination, he

was appointed professor in a Calcutta college. He was thirty when he went to Berlin as one of India's representatives to the World Congress of Religions. His speech there and his subsequent lectures in different parts of Europe aroused deep interest in Indian thought and religion. He believed profoundly in the world-values of India's ancient culture. He set on fire the hearts of many with his vision of making the wisdom of India's *rishis* part of the dynamics of the entire world.

He became principal of Dyal Singh College in Lahore. He believed that the end of right education is character-building and, with this in view, introduced a number of new features in the curriculum.

From the beginning of his days, his heart was smitten with love for the Lord. He longed to dedicate his life to the service of Him and His suffering children. He was forty years old when his mother passed away. His only link with earthly existence having been broken, he resigned his lucrative job, renouncing everything to announce the eternal.

He moved across the length and breadth of India. He went to cities. He visited villages. He met men, women, and children. He looked into their needs. He found that the bodies of many were famished, their souls impoverished. He called upon the people of India to organize themselves for the service of humanity.

Dadaji pleaded for a renaissance among the peasants. "The masses form the nation," he said. "Civilizations decay in the measure that the quality of the masses is poor. The worst slavery is the slavery of the poor. How to abolish it? Land I regard as the one thing needful. Redistribution of the land is essential to my scheme. Give land to the poor and teach them scientific methods of intensive agriculture and cooperative organization."

In 1933, Beloved Dada founded the Mira Movement in Education, which today has its headquarters in Poona. The movement emphasizes: 1) character-building, 2) heroic living, and 3) spiritual enfolding.

He worked on, day after day, wanting nothing for himself, seeking only opportunities to serve the poor, the lonely, and the lost. His body was weak, and for a number of years he was unable to move but felt he had the "strength of ten" because in his heart was love and every fibre of his being thrilled with faith in man and God. He kept away from the honors of the earth and always rejoiced in wisdom as his wealth and the service of the oppressed and distressed as the treasure of his quest.

He was a gifted orator and prolific writer – the author of over five hundred books and booklets. His teaching, in brief, is that in the love of God and the service of man is the secret of true life. His heart rose in reverence to all saints and prophets of the East and West. He believed in the unity of all races and religions in the One Spirit. He awakened many with his call of "Build ye a bridge of brotherhood between East and West.

Dadaji never tired of asking for blessings and guidance from all who came

to him. During the latter part of his life, he was revered as a saint and crowds followed him wherever he went. Religion, to him, was not rites and ceremonies, not creeds and conformities. "Religion," he said, "is life, is fellowship, is mingling of the individual with the Great Life. And this is not shut up in the temples. This is moving in the market place. The Great God is not somewhere in isolation. The Great God is in the procession of life. Greet Him there. You will meet him in the sweat and struggle of life, in the tears and tragedies of the poor – wiping the tears of the poor and singing his new Gita for the new age!"

"The creation of God," he said, "is bound by golden chains to the Feet of the One God, the One Divine Father of us all. At His lotus-feet are we all one – men of different religion and non-religion. No one is alien in the Kingdom of God." All scriptures, he taught, were custodians of spiritual wisdom. Communism, too, he said, enshrined a truth to which it owed its dynamic character. To him all sectarian strife and quarrels in the name of religion were due to lack of understanding. "I belong to no sect," he said. "I adore but one God. And my faith is to worship the One Mystery and to do good to all." Sometimes I felt, on going near to him, that to touch the hem of his garment was to commune with God. His life had the fragrance of the rose and the benediction of the singing bird.

There was a time when he rubbed shoulders with the tallest in the land. In those days, his name was connected with those of Gandhi and Tagore as one of the three leaders of New India. But he chose to walk the humble way. He made of his life an offering at the altar of suffering humanity. Compassion flowed out of his heart in an endless stream. Not once did I know him fail to answer the call of human suffering.

Every day he sat underneath the trees he loved and gave to the poor and broken ones who came to him. He gave them money. He gave them food. He gave them clothing. Above all, he gave them the benedictions of his loving heart. Till the last day of his earth-life he served them. His earth-pilgrimage ended on January 16, 1966, at Poona, where, at his place of work and final rest, has been built a shrine which is visited by hundreds of pilgrims from both East and West.

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God speaks to us in silence, wrote Ladislaus Boros in *Hidden God*. Boros explained that attentive man can even *hear the voice of nature*. He pointed out that stones, flowers and trees all speak to man. That he receives these hidden voices silently into his own self. A person's life moves with them. The signs of the world, to which he has become attentive become transformed into part of his own inner life.

*– Audrey Carli*

# Prayer Wheel

A tourist visiting a monastery in Asia came upon a prayer wheel. It contained a compartment where a sheaf of papers was stored – papers on which prayers were written.

The tourist turned the wheel several times, and then stood there in perplexed reflection.

A monk who had watched him observantly walked over and started a conversation.

"I noticed that you seemed perplexed," the monk commented.

"You observed correctly," the tourist admitted. "It seems very odd to me that the mechanical turning of this wheel should be classified as praying. I don't even know what's written on the sheaf of papers I have been rotating. I find this practice very questionable."

"Does the turning of the wheel suggest anything else to you?" the monk probed.

"I don't know that it does," the tourist frankly confessed.

"Are there are not wheels within yourself as well as outside?" the monk suggested.

"I hadn't thought of that," the tourist acknowledged.

"Many men turn the wheel of ambition for a lifetime," the monk observed. "We are more concerned with the wheel of aspiration."

"You cast an entirely different light on the subject."

"We seek to turn the wheel of compassion daily and hourly. As a cart is drawn by wheels, so are our lives directed by the wheels of thought, meditation, and reasonableness. They will not turn themselves, but must be set in motion by a deliberate act of the will. Our very destiny is dependent on the wheels that we set awhirl within ourselves."

"Are you saying that the prayer wheel is really a symbol, a reminder of the inner wheels that every man ought to set in motion?"

"Rightly have you understood," the monk nodded.

*– Francis Merchant*

# My Father's Legacy

*by Royalyn Lawrence*

I AM the possessor of a nearly completed crossword puzzle dated April 6, 1961, a partially empty package of Camel cigarets which were probably bought during the same week, a much-used razor containing a dull, rusty blade, and a letter written to me in 1944 on the occasion of my sixth birthday. These articles are kept in a metal box which also contains several sea shells, a military ID tag, a broken watch band, and a note which I found on my dresser one night upon returning from a date. Folded within the note is a rose pressed against the words "Just in case you wondered, 'twas me. Love, Daddy."

Now and then I look at these articles as I rummage through the drawer in which the box rests. Sometimes I look deliberately, for many years have passed, and I want to see, I suppose, how long love lasts. At other times I come upon the box unexpectedly as I search for an infrequently used scarf or glove, and it is at this latter instance that I catch my breath and a pain clutches my chest and I know that love lasts as long as my memories.

I am awed and confused as I wait, holding the cold metal box, for my heart to resume its normal rhythm, that it is possible for a person to *be* at one moment and, in the next, *not* to be, and that, as the years pass, it is as if a man never was. That I too will suffer this same fate is well documented by poets and by the reality of time and by the passing of other lives. That both the famous and unknown will ultimately share nonentity is small comfort to me. We are here, and then we are not, and so we are without earthly existence after a brief time.

When my memories and I are gone, a bit more of my father will die, for my son never knew him and my sister's oldest son remembers only a little. The transmission of my father's life, of his reality, will be almost totally halted soon, and though he was not one of the famous, this seems a loss I cannot tolerate. In the flurry of my own efforts to survive in the world, I am frightened at times that I can't really recall his face, but at other moments I am comforted by the mass of images that floods my mind. What he did and the way he looked are parts of what he was while he was here. The images are colored and delineated so clearly, and I pass them on because many of you will know what I am attempting to accomplish and you will understand that my intentions are important.

Small in stature, bald, and often seen with a wad of tobacco in his mouth in the later years of his life, my father was the most sophisticated and dignified man I've ever known. The second eldest of seven children, he left his western Kentucky farm home when he was seventeen years old to join

the Navy. The year was 1917, and though he left his parents and siblings and the dirt-floored farmhouse in body, his heart or at least a generous portion of it always remained there. He had won his permission to leave home after years of hard work. They were years of witnessing the death of a brother after his appendix ruptured, mornings of getting up at sunrise after being awakened by the clatter of an alarm-clock placed in a dish pan. There were times of fear and helplessness and running to the house to report that another brother had lost a foot in a farming accident, and of sharing the sorrow of his mother at yet another stillborn baby. All the years were hard for that family, but they were not always harsh.There was the firm yet gentle discipline from parents who cared; there was swimming in the farm pond if one splashed wildly enough to chase the snakes out of the water first, and there were sunny afternoons of pulling his baby brother Ben in his wagon with the child's face always to the sun to hasten sleepiness so that the older brother could get on with the business of being a boy.

His leavetaking was earned. Upon learning that his son wanted to join the Navy, my grandfather said to him, "Well, Roy, I'll give my permission, but you'll have to beat me in a footrace." Of course the son won the race, and perhaps the father in his wisdom was a little slack in his own efforts because he realized that it was time and that if the child was not denied his independence he would always come back.

And he did always go back, even after the farm was sold. The place, near a dot in the road called Joy, was forever precious. During the years before he married my mother, he sent an allotment home, saved enough to build his parents a house with wood floors, and in later years took my mother and my older sister there with as much pride as if he had been taking them to a palace or to Christmas dinner on the battleship *New York* on which he proudly served. On those visits to the farm there was always fried chicken for dinner, with the men eating first and the children last, and if the sky clouded a warning of rain everyone hurried to his car in order to get out of the dirt lane which led off the main road to the house.

Long after his parents had moved to town, my father returned to the old homeplace to gaze at the fields now worked by other hands. I can almost hear him now as he and his brothers leaned against the car recalling the past on the rare occasions when two or three of them could make the drive out into the country and would allow me to tag along and share their remembrances.

When my grandfather died, I rode with them once again as they spoke of what a man he had been, and I stood at the fresh grave site and heard him cry, "If only I could talk to him again!" At the time I felt so sorry for him and was so certain I understood in all the wisdom and experience of my seventeen years. Not until I stood in the same quite cemetery named Bethel,

across the road from the white clapboard church, did I learn the difference between sorry and sorrow, as I too longed to speak to my father once more and struggled with the pain of knowing I never would.

He had taught me so much during the years we shared, and I realize now that he was teaching me all along the way although I often struggled against his demands and standards. When I became aware in high school of my own potential as a student, he encouraged me to learn still more, to achieve academically more than he had. He had completed the eighth grade, but I was to be different – I was to attend college, to acquire that piece of paper which, he assured me, "no one can ever take away from you." He read *Time* and *Newsweek* voraciously, and each week he would hand the copies to me, asking that I read a certain article, and then quiz me about the article and about what I thought of the ideas and news it reported. He had read hungrily since leaving school. He knew through experience that those who did not read were missing a great deal of joy and knowledge.

I recall telling him goodnight in the house we rented in New Hampshire where he was on recruiting-duty after the war. I would go to bed each night with a vivid picture in my mind of him stretched out in his chair with our cocker spaniel Corky on his lap and the latest volume from the Book-of-the-Month Club in his hands.

Years later, when I was in college in Memphis and was still unable to harmonize my father's values with those of myself and my friends, I sneaked out of the dorm one Friday afternoon and caught the bus to my hometown. I had been evasive and vague with my parents about whether I was to go home that weekend, for I hadn't wanted to commit myself to a plan I might not be able to carry off. But, the day before, I had taken my suitcase to the bus station and placed it in a locker and, leaving, I felt exhilarated and happy to be going home for a two-night weekend rather than the one overnight a month we nursing students were allowed to have.

After I made my illegal exit from the nursing residence, my sister had called me on the telephone to find out if I was going home or not so that my parents would know if they were to meet the bus. After repeated calls, my roommate finally admitted to my sister that I had sneaked out and that if she continued to call, the housemother would catch on and conduct a search and I would be found out.

My sister immediately called home and informed our father of what I had done. Later that evening, after the tiring five-hour bus ride, I blithely walked off the bus and there stood my father. I greeted him, aware immediately of his unaccustomed coldness. On the way to our house he didn't say a word to me. When we arrived home, I asked my mother what was wrong and she informed me that they knew what I had done and that my father was deeply hurt that I would be so deceitful.

When I tried to talk to him about it, he was adamant. My telling him that "all the girls did it" made no difference and when he explained that in all his thirty years in the Navy he had never reported late even when he might have gotten away with it, I wasn't impressed. I cried out, "Daddy, you expect too much of me!" But I was beginning at least to learn values which have become important guidelines for my adult life. I know too that I am attempting to instill these sames values in my own child and that he probably feels as I did that too much is expected. I am attempting, I suppose, to recreate a bit of my father in my son, for I have learned and am still learning that it is so easy to compromise and so difficult and so rewarding to live a life that has nothing to hide.

When my father died, I put away his clothes. My reason was twofold. I didn't want my mother to undertake such a task which would be so agonizing immediately after the funeral, and I wanted to experience my own grief as intensely and as soon as possible. I was naive in dealing with death. One cannot get grief over and done with in a hurry as if it were a dreaded task. As I folded the gray tweed sports-jacket with its familiar aroma of tobacco, I recalled that I had bought the jacket for him after I had gone to work and started earning my own money. I had bought it almost in anger that he owned not a single sports-coat that I considered presentable. Like his tobacco-chewing, I admit that his lack of a proper wardrobe was cause for occasional embarrassment to me. After the funeral, though, I was able to perceive, as we often are when it's too late, that his clothes were less than stylish because his money was spent on everyone except himself. It was suddenly and clearly enough for me to recall that his shoes were always polished, that his carriage was always erect and proud, that his eyes sparkled with the love he felt for us. I could see him in that jacket as he passed the offering plate at Sunday night church, and I have never sat through that portion of worship in our church in subsequent years without recalling that my father was the tallest man ever to walk down that aisle.

During Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners, the conversation invariably gets around to family stories and, at the risk of boring the four grandchildren who never knew my father, I eagerly encourage the retelling of events from the past. It is a comfort somehow and a way of keeping him with us, very much like my browsing through the metal box. My sister and I tell Jeff, the oldest grandchild, who remembers him a little, how his grandfather bought an air conditioner just for his baby comfort, and we describe the way he carried the small boy through the house and into the yard introducing him to the neighbors, to the roses, to the starlit sky, to the world, I show all the grandchildren the picture which hangs on the wall of a thirty-eight-year-old man who had earned the rank of chief petty officer and proudly remind them that on his retirement from the Navy he had attained the rank of second

lieutenant, no small feat for an enlisted man lacking a high-school education. I describe the Christmas packages wrapped in tinsel and glitter sent from far away places which, when opened, revealed treasures of velvet dresses with lace collars, hula skirts, and entire boxes of chewing gum and peppermint patties.

But special occasions aren't the only times which call forth memories. In our everyday lives I tell my son that I can now understand how much my father loved me and how much he recognized the potential inherent in my life if I could but learn and grow. I tell him that when he becomes a parent he will understand how much I love him and what hope I have for his life. I am trying, though he chafes with impatience, to transmit love through generations and that is no easy task. And yet, if just one grandchild or great-grandchild benefits from the heritage of love which my father left us, if just one can learn the importance of education, if just one refuses to be dishonest, if just one becomes a loving and conscientious parent, then part of this man will never die. I know that many young sailors saw the example of my father's life and were better for it, for one came searching for him just a few years before his death to tell him so. And I know the degree of love my father was capable of evoking, for I once asked my mother why she would never argue with him and I thought she was just being unnecessarily submissive until she explained, "I love him too much to hurt him."

Days, weeks, even months pass in my busy world and I don't think consciously of my father. Yet all that I am is because of him and the nagging thought that is always present that I should be more because of his influence keeps me striving when I might be defeated.

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The apocryphal story is told that some followers of Martin Luther one day approached him in an eschatological mood to ask what he would do tomorrow if he were assured that the world would come to an end the day after. He replied, "I would go out and plant an apple tree."

*– James Luther Adams in THE CHRISTIAN CENTURY*

## LETTERS

Dear Sir:

Thank you very much for your decision to have printed my letter which lead Mrs. M. to give me a lifetime subscription to the publication. I cannot express in words the deepest feeling to my heart, my gratitude to the Fellowship in Prayer and to her for the wonderful chain of loving hearts, bestowed to a very faraway, unknown and unseen friend. For me personally it is a miracle. It is unique, the most unexpected kindness ever to happen in my life.

This lifetime subscription gift is my prize gift. The news for it reached me a day before my birthday, December 15, and on Christmas time. What more could I wish? It will be my lifetime birthday gift and my lifetime Christmas gift. I am extremely happy. In the midst of troubled times yours and Mrs. M's help, concern, and prayers will surely strengthen me and is already strengthening me. To be a deserving recipient of a priceless gift I resolved a "lifetime" resolution to join the spirit and purpose of the Fellowship in Prayer.

Below are the names you can send complimentary copies.

Once more, should you find parts of my letter edifying for the publication, feel free to put it into print.

Very gratefully yours,

(Mrs.) Alejandra A. Ambida, Philippines

---

Fellowship in Prayer
Suite 250E, 20 Nassau Street
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Date _____

I enclose $ as a donation to FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER toward furthering the work. (All contributions are tax-deductible.) As an Associate Member, I will receive the equivalent of a subscription to its bi-monthly.

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BOOK REVIEW

# The Heroic Temper

A MONARCH and an enfranchised slave have stirred the imagination of men for many centuries. Marcus Aurelius, the Roman emperor, reached conclusions similar to those of Epictetus, a former slave who became a philosopher. One lived in an ornate palace; the other in a humble cottage, enjoying only the bare necessities of life. Both agreed that man is not a plaything of his environment, either hurled aloft or cast down by capricious fate. The source of his greatness or weakness lies within himself.

The truth of this contention may be derived from the life of Epictetus. He was born a slave and finally secured his freedom. Belonging to the lower class of Roman society, he could scarcely have been expected to achieve distinction. He chose a self-abnegating profession, namely, that of a philosopher, and by so doing made a permanent place for himself in the history of the Stoic movement.

In about 90 A.D., the Emperor Domitian, fearing the light cast by searching thought, banished all philosophers from Rome. Epictetus packed his few belongings and, at the age of forty, went to Nicopolis, a city in Greece. There he practiced philosophy. What he said was taken down by a student named Arrian and so transmitted to posterity.

How did Epictetus, born in slavery and afflicted by lameness, become so influential that his name has echoed down the centuries? The answer is to be found in the philosophy he evolved.

To begin with, Epictetus made a significant distinction between what lies in our power and what does not. We are all subject to time, death, and circumstances. They are not subject to our control. Happiness based on such variable factors is precarious. What, however, is not dependent on anything external? The answer is: the manner in which we choose to respond to the ever-varying circumstances of life. "Men are disturbed not by things, but by the views which they take of things." Every situation is of itself less important than the way in which we react to it. Grief comes from attachment. If we care naught for fame, the loss of popularity will not be distressing. Dwindling money resources will affect us in proportion to our evaluation of their importance.

We cannot entirely control circumstances, but we can determine how we shall confront them. "Externals are not in power; choice is." Although we must submit to time, we can choose how to use the hours and days it provides. Such power of choice lies in the will – our most precious possession. Greatness and meanness arise from the exercise of this faculty.

Epictetus admonishes us to find what is truly our own. Our property, like our body, we have on loan; eventually we must give back to our Maker what

we have received. The choices we have made in the course of a lifetime, however, are truly our own, constituting the very essence of our nature. The power to choose is a gift bestowed on every man, and by its use he may become a god or a beast. Some persons, unfortunately, follow the second course. "Because of our animal kinship, some of us incline toward it and become like wolves – faithless, and crafty and mischievous; others, like lions, wild and savage and untamed; but most of us like foxes, which, even in the animal kingdom, are low and degraded. For what is a slanderous and ill-natured man but a fox, or something even more wretched and mean?"

If man can sink to the level of the beast, how can he rise to the stature of a god? Epictetus avers that this nobler possibility is given to everyone and that it is not dependent on outer circumstances. His own life is a demonstration that external matters cannot quench the philosophic search. "I am without a country, without a house, without an estate....I lie on the ground; have no wife, no children, no coat; but have only earth and heaven and one poor cloak. And what do I need? Am I not without sorrow, without fear? Am not I free?...Did I ever blame God or man?...Who that sees me does not think he sees his own king and master? Such a demonstration proves that man can arise above any circumstances by invoking the power of the spirit.

The acquisition of such an heroic temper involves a number of deeply-felt convictions. "You are a distinct portion of the essence of God," Epictetus held. To a detractor he remarked, "You carry a God about you, poor wretch, and know nothing of it." To another he said, "Why, when you are a worm, do you call yourself a man?" He could be scathing in his replies. "Your one-inch soul shoots up a yard high."

The philosopher, Epictetus declared, is a citizen of the universe, a part of the grand pageant enacted by heavenly bodies. Never should we forget the Great Artificer who has placed us here for a season to observe and interpret his works. "Great is God" should be our theme, the giver of all things. "Because most of you are blind and insensible...what else can I do, a lame old man, but sing hymns to God?" No matter how materialistic the world may be, he will not forget the Creator to whom he is indebted. "It is my duty to praise God. This is my business; I do it; nor will I ever desert this post, so long as it is permitted me; and I call on you to join me in the same song." In commending Diogenes, Epictetus said, "He never had to inquire whether he should act for the good of the whole universe; for he remembered that everything that exists has its source in its administration, and is commanded by its ruler." To model one's decisions on what is good for the universe poses problems that few men ever face.

Epictetus did not deny that man is related to the animals and could sink to their level. However, every human being is also related to divinity by virtue of the faculties of reason and judgment. Because his rational nature makes him akin to deity, "Why should not such a man call himself a citizen of the

universe? Why not a son of God?"

Right human relations result from the realization that all human beings are externalizations of deity. In truth, "They are by nature your relations, your brothers...they are the offspring of God." The laws enacted by men are but faint approximations of the "divine laws" that govern the universe. Deity concerns itself with the common good, and human beings are so consituted "that no one can attain his own good without contributing something to the good of all."

He poses a challenge when he tells his followers to "be of service to mankind." One way in which to serve is to bear with others and not vent "upon them your own ill-humor." At the same time he admonishes, "Laugh a little at yourself."

The standards set by Epictetus were, as one might guess, too high for his contemporaries. He longed to see someone who really exemplified the teachings of Stoicism, but found all too few. "Show me a human soul desiring to be in unity with God," he cried, "not to accuse either God or man; not to be disappointed of its desire, nor incur its aversion; not to be angry, not to be envious, not to be jealous; in a word, desiring from a man to become a god; and in this poor mortal body, aiming to have fellowship with Zeus. Show him to me. But you cannot." Any age would have been hard put to produce men of this caliber.

Man is the work of the Master Artist who created the universe, and he has been given guardianship over himself. "If God had committed some orphan to your care, would you have been thus careless of him? He has delivered yourself to your care, and says, 'I had no one fitter to be trusted than you; preserve this person as he is by nature, modest, faithful, noble, unterrified, dispassionate, tranquil.' The greatest duty is to take good care of the self over which we have been chosen to preside. Withdrawing into the citadel of the soul, therefore, we fulfill our trust by diligently improving 'what is immortal within us.' A simplification of perspective comes from the realization, 'If a right choice be the only good, and a wrong one the only evil, what further room is there for quarreling and for reviling?' "

To seek high place or much wealth, yet neglect greatness of soul, is unwise. "Though you should rise to the palace, you will be a slave nonetheless." Desire must be tamed by the will. Tragedy is "but the dramatized sufferings of men bewildered by their admiration for things external." The materials with which the philosopher works are the very stuff of common circumstances. "A weaver does not make the wool, but employs his art upon what is given him." Principles affirmed must become principles applied. To approve good and enact evil is hypocrisy. "Shall I show you the muscular training of a philosopher?" Epictetus asks, and answers, "A will undisappointed, evils avoided, powers duly exerted, careful resolutions, unerring decisions." A program of inner activity is inherent in the three

directives, "learning, meditation, and practice."

The philosopher exorcises the fear of death, that bugbear of humanity. The anticipation of this terminal experience holds men in thrall rather than the event itself. The philosopher prepares for this inevitability by contemplating it in advance. "Set death before me; set pain, a prison, disgrace, doom, and you will know me." He is quite prepared to make room for others who wish to have their turn in pilgrimaging through life. "Others, too, must be born as you were. . .Why do you crowd the world?" When the lease on the body expires, why repine? And after you have received all, and even your very self, from God, are you angry with the giver, and do you complain, if he takes anything away from you?" You have been invited to a festival for a short time to observe the administration of the universe. "After having beheld the spectacle and the solemnity, then, as long as it is permitted you, will you not depart when he leads you out, adoring and thankful for what you have heard and seen?" Epictetus assumes, and there are many persons who refuse to make a comparable assumption, that "what God wills" is "better than what I will."

This philosopher would have graced any age. With a few more like him, the river of history might be wisely diverted for the good of mankind.

– *Francis Merchant*

•

*Nuclear Prayer.* Nobody is selling insurance policies, nuclear bombs or Three-Mile-Island-style "accidents," but New York writer Jerome Goldblatt says he may have found one. In researching his scientific-religious manuscript, "A Snapshot of the Resurrection," he turned up the report of an obscure 1950's expleriment. He says nuclear scientists measuring the brain waves of a dying women – "in communication with God" – discovered a power output "twenty times the amount needed to stop a particle in a cyclotron and insulate against practically any amount of heat, radiated energy, or any other force."

# Pieta

Mary, here your burden bearing,
cast upon your lap in death.
Soft within your womb you bore him;
care for every tender breath;
guided him in wakeful hours;
soothed him in each childish dream.
Now his agonized young body
killed by mankind's angry scheme.
Once he lay where your heart beating
cradled safe to heart and breast;
grew in love, your words repeating,
"Love, forgiveness – these are best."
Gentle Mary, seated sorrow,
in your pose is solitude.
What awaited your tomorrow?
All too late came rectitude.
Broken bones, and dislocation
of the human heart and mind –
all is worldly desiccation,
peace, there is none with mankind.
Here the sculptured marble poses:
gown and wimple; bones' outline.
At his feet a spray of roses –
in your arms he lies supine.
Cups of red with lighted candles
glow like coals beneath your feet.
Gone his seamless robe and sandals –
yet in light he rose, replete.

*–Elizabeth Twyeffort*

# MEDITATION

## Do Not Be Discouraged by Weaknesses

Be not discouraged nor dismayed by the recognition of your many weaknesses and limitations, for all that you admire in self makes it only the more difficult to surrender to Me. Strive constantly to free your heart, which is ever pure, knowing that I desire no other offering from you. So long as you are aware of the battle against self, you will ultimately win. Complacency is your greatest enemy and despair his ultimate tool. In all that you do, consider the ultimate result upon your own spiritual development. Strive against all temptations which lead to judging yourself unkindly. It is the small things each man encounters moment by moment and day by day that will either destroy him or lead him to the kingdom. And no other man or circumstance of events external to you can block your progress, once your heart is set upon the spiritual path. All suffering then becomes a boon and all unkindness an opportunity to exercise your faith.

See Me ever lovingly beside you, and your decisions will never be in doubt. Practice loving, that you receive love; give that you might receive; and pray for others that accordingly it be done for you.

*– Ernest Frederick Pecci,*
*MEDITATIVE INSIGHTS*
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## ASK

*If*
*a prayer*
*is needed for someone*
*or for yourself,*
*let us know.*

*Write*
*or phone: (609) 924-0880.*

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# Suggested BOOKS

Following are some of the books which have been used in the preparation of this issue:

HIGH LEVEL WELLNESS by Donald B. Ardell. Bantam Books, 666 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York 11019.

BODYMIND By Ken Dychtwaid. Pantheon Books, 201 E. 50 Street, New York, New York 10022.

HOLISTIC HEALTH HANDBOOK compiled by the Berkely Holistic Health Center. And/Or Press, Berkeley, California

HINDUISM by K. M. Sen. Penguin Books, 625 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10022.

DISCOURSES AND ENCHRIDION by Epictetus. Translated by Thomas Wentworth Higginson. Walter J. Black, New York. Classics Club Ed.

# Snagged Threads

*by Liz Socolow*

*She cries out at the snagged thread*
*in her husband's tweed jacket*
*and I know she wants each thing*
*to be its own best self, that best*
*closer to perfection than to comfort,*
*each thread in place, the suit*
*declaring the tailor's pattern*
*not her husband's shape.*
*I hurt for her ambition.*

*Dogs with ticks and fleas, the old*
*upholstered chair cat-scratched on one arm,*
*the begonia with dry brown moths,*
*dead flowers among the green,*
*the unmade bed,*
*the spill of light through windows*
*and the snag of one thread*
*that makes the eye revel in the weave*
*of all the rest.*

*She cries out.*
*I see parades of small disorder,*
*signs of life.*